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CLOUD DECAY, MALIBU CANYON, BY BRUCE BARNES/ALUM

*This...*

## What Future for the

**D**ESPITE the popular image of Los Angeles as a smoggy, sprawling urban center, it is the only major city in the country containing a rugged mountain range. The Santa Monica Mountains rise in the heart of the nation's second largest city and stretch for fifty miles to the sea. Deep canyons with flowing creeks, ancient oak groves, sand dunes, and mountain-top vistas entice city dwellers to retreat from the urban bustle to the serenity of a natural setting. Numerous varieties of sage and sumac and hillsides of wildflowers perfume the air over the mountains.

Estuarine lagoons attract innumerable shorebirds, and tidepools teem with aquatic life. Most of the two hundred thousand acres of the Santa Monicas, extending across Los Angeles and Ventura counties, are still untouched by the many suburban developments that have been spreading over the entire surrounding flatland.

The northernmost four of the eight Channel Islands are the westernmost peaks of the mountain chain and are separated from the mainland by only ten miles of Pacific Ocean. Two of the Channel Islands are already designated as a



*...or This?*

## Santa Monicas?

The Santa Monica Mountains must be protected within the next few years if this unusual natural retreat is to be saved from developers

by ANTHONY C. BEILENSON

national monument. All of the islands provide habitat for a large population of sea elephants, seals, and sea lions along the Pacific Coast and for numerous rare and endangered plants, animals, and sea birds. Thousands of years of separation from the mainland have produced many species that took different evolutionary courses from mainland forms. As a result, many of the islands' plant species, such as certain varieties of oak, poppy, morning glory, and paintbrush, and animals such as the island kitfox and the island night lizard are found nowhere else in the world.

The future use of this rugged coastal mountain range will be decided in the next few years. Without government action, the human population in the mountains will double in less than twenty years. The Santa Monica Mountains Comprehensive Planning Commission has estimated that without extensive parkland acquisition and restraints on land use the population in the mountain region will grow from the present 192,000 people to between 319,000 and 356,000 by 1990.

Developers have already submitted plans to local governments

to erect several thousand new single-family homes and townhouses. Three large proposed developments alone would add 12,000 inhabitants to the mountains. The tops of ridges would be cut off to create flat lots for modern housing tracts. Even now, natural stream beds are being converted into concrete drainage channels, and the canyons are being used as landfills for Los Angeles wastes. The opportunity to preserve this vast scenic wild area is slipping away all too quickly.

Threats to the Channel Islands and mainland seashore come

mostly from plans for energy development. The Department of the Interior proposes to lease large tracts of the outer continental shelf near the islands and in Santa Monica Bay for offshore oil development in 1979. In addition to oil drilling, the waters over the submerged part of the Santa Monica mountain chain will be used for shipping crude oil and probably liquid gas as well, creating a potential hazard of unpredictable dimensions. Of greater significance than the esthetically undesirable effects of offshore oil rigs, the shores and waters will be threatened with an increased risk of oil spills, blowouts,

seepage, and routine losses from the expanded oil exploration and tanker traffic. A report entitled *Offshore Oil and Gas Development: Southern California*, released by the California State Office of Planning and Research in August 1977, predicts that oil spilled anywhere in the Santa Barbara Channel will be washed ashore on either the islands or the mainland or both.

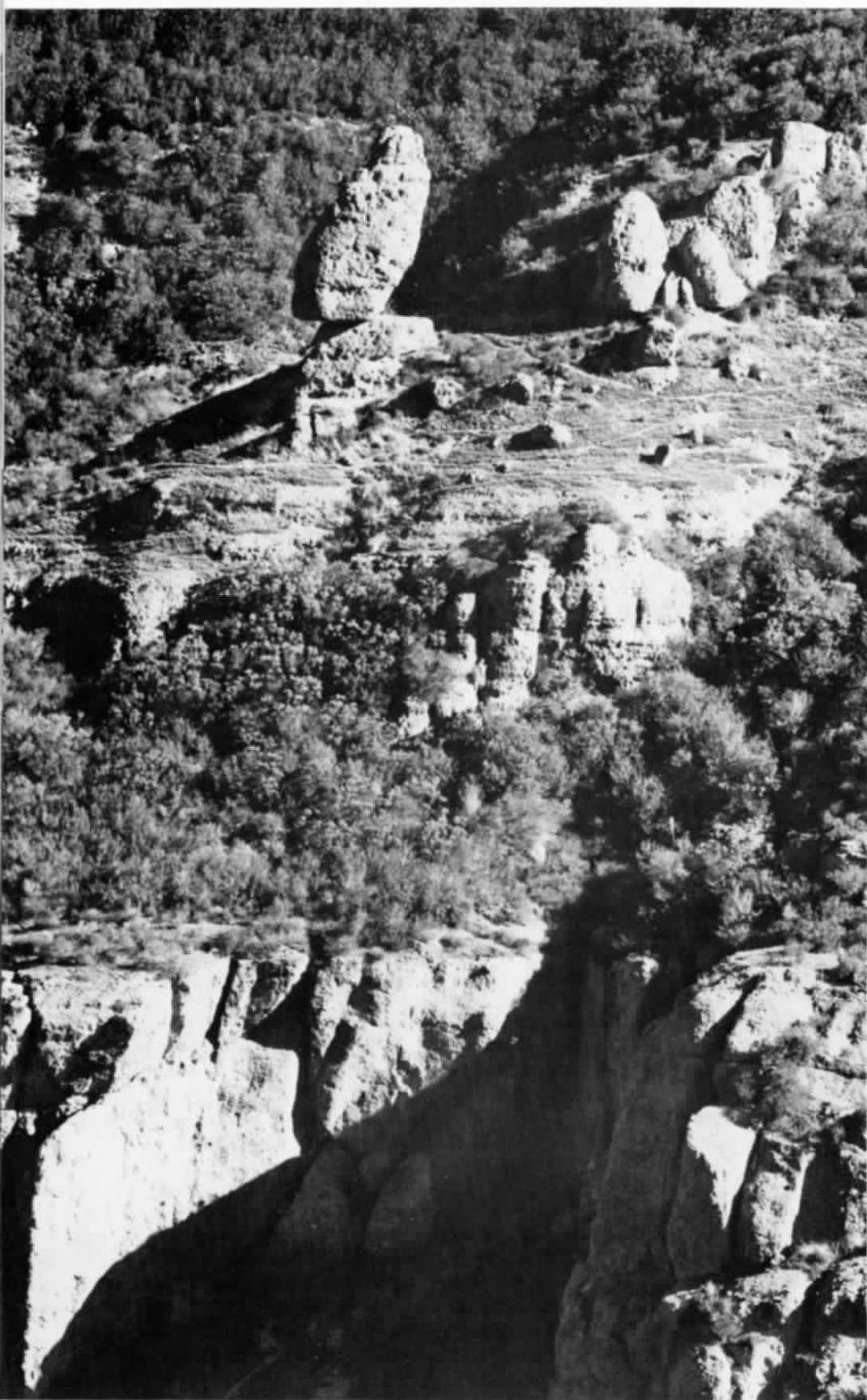
**P**RESERVING the Santa Monica Mountains will bestow a number of benefits on the surrounding communities and the nation. The mountains and seashore provide a magnificent recrea-

tional opportunity for the area's ten million residents as well as the eight million visitors who come annually to Southern California. The mountains provide relief from the noisy, stressful, polluted world below them. The ridges and peaks offer majestic ocean vistas. The mountains and islands contain more than a thousand archeological sites, some dating back as far as ten thousand years, which reveal the history and culture of California's earliest inhabitants, the ancient Chumash peoples, as well as of other Indian groups. The hillsides and canyons contain a diversity of native plants and animals, and a



COASTLINE AT LEO CARILLO STATE BEACH, BY BRUCE BARNBAUM





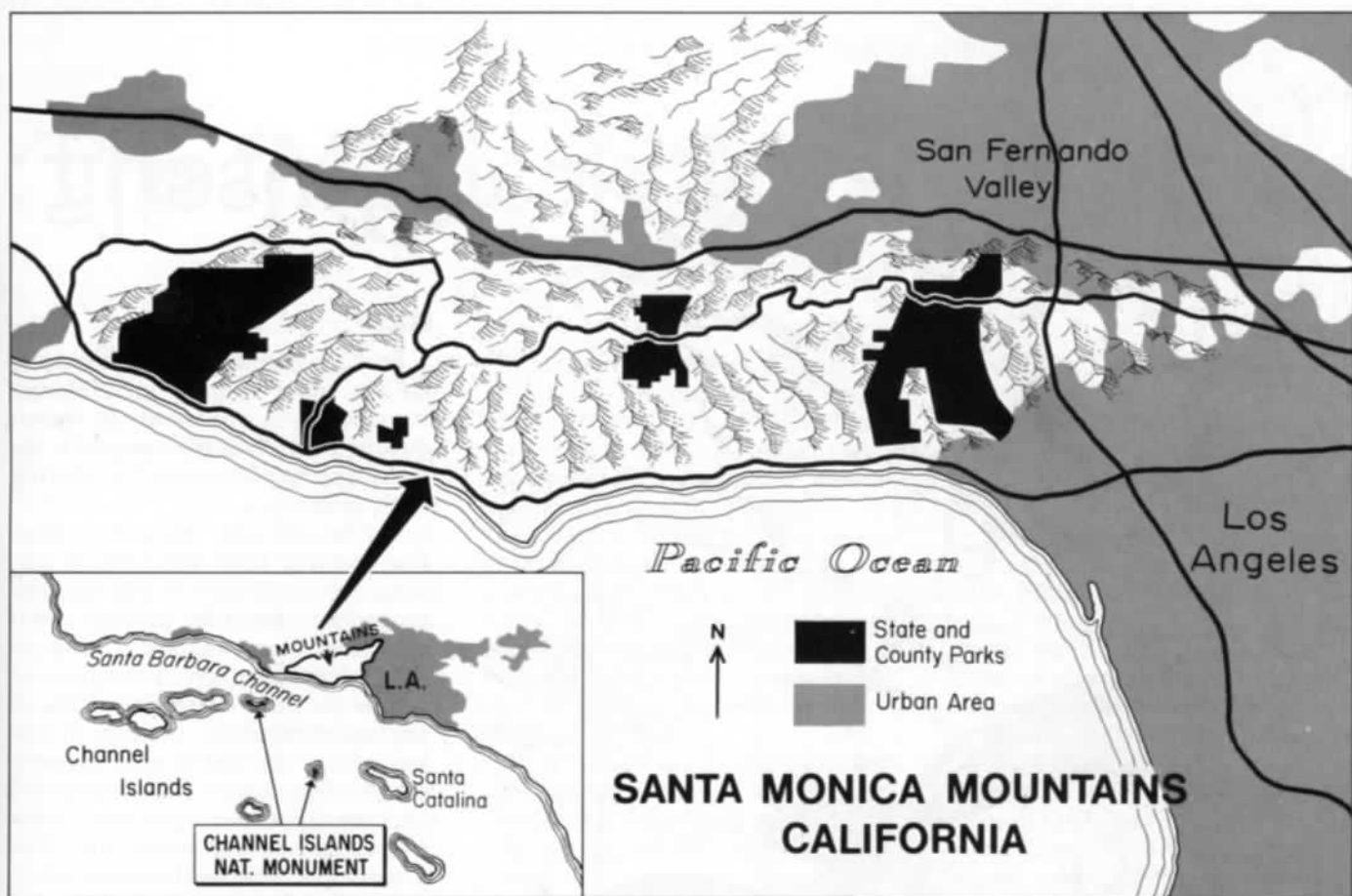
CLIFFS AND BALANCED ROCK NEAR BONEY MOUNTAIN, BY BRUCE BARNBAUM

*ranchos*. By the 1900s, homesteaders had moved into the mountains around the *ranchos*, and pressures mounted for subdivision and development. A few of the original landholders and their descendants fought for years to preserve the huge ranches and to prevent highways, railways, and water projects. However, land that could be purchased for ten cents an acre in the 1850s was worth ten dollars an acre by the turn of the century. Fortunes were made and lost in the Santa Monicas as large landholdings were subdivided and became exclusive residential communities. By the 1940s, urbanization was sweeping Los Angeles, consuming all the available open space. Miraculously, nearly 200,000 acres of land in the mountains remain unspoiled.

**D**URING the past decade California embarked on an aggressive parkland acquisition program and created three large state parks in the Santa Monicas totaling more than 31,000 acres. If we are to reap the benefits of the mountains, however—if we are to protect the airshed, take advantage of the diverse recreational opportunities, preserve archeological sites and natural habitat—we will need to more than double the amount of land in public ownership.

When we consider all the benefits, I think the cost of achieving these benefits is not so large. For \$100 million to \$150 million, at current market values of \$500 to \$4,000 an acre, 30,000 to 50,000 additional acres of parkland and beaches could be purchased. Such a purchase would preserve the heart of the mountain range and its contiguous seashore. By connecting the three existing state parks and public beaches with additional parkland and seashore, we could create a continuous equestrian and hiking trail from the heart of Los Angeles to the sea.

Of course, after initial purchase, rules and regulations must be established not only for the park's management but also for the use of lands bordering the public lands.



Buffer areas should be zoned by local governments for fewer dwellings per acre and lower population density and for uses compatible with recreational land and wildlife habitat, such as agricultural use.

In 1976 the California state legislature created the Santa Monica Mountains Comprehensive Planning Commission and charged it with developing a plan for protecting the mountains. That protection will require, according to the commission, a national parkland acquisition program and some restrictions on land use in the rest of the mountain area. Unfortunately, the state legislature did not give the commission power to regulate land use in order to implement its plan. The plan must be submitted to the legislature, and further legislation will be necessary to implement it.

The Channel Islands and the mainland coastline also must be protected from threats beyond the land's edge. Multiple-use conflicts

among wildlife and sea life habitat, recreational use, military activities (the area is a missile target range for Air Force and Navy tests from Point Mugu and San Nicolas), tanker traffic, and offshore oil and gas development must be resolved. Oil spill containment methods must be tested and improved. The Department of the Interior should reconsider its proposed lease sale near the islands and should require strict safety precautions to prevent oil spillage. Tanker safety regulations need to be tightened to reduce risks to the fragile island ecosystems. The Department of Commerce could also protect against the hazard of oil spills in this active seismic area by designating the waters for twelve miles around the islands for special protection under the Marine Sanctuaries Act.

**E**ACH LEVEL of government —local, state, and federal— must share in the cost of protecting

the Santa Monicas. If we don't act quickly, this mountain range in the midst of the nation's second largest metropolis with so many present and potential benefits to offer the public will be used to benefit land speculators, developers, and the fortunate few wealthy enough to live in the subdivisions the developers build there. The millions of Los Angeles residents and visitors to the metropolitan area will lose a priceless opportunity as houses creep up the ridges, dry up the streams, and drive out the wildlife. We can always build subdivisions, tennis courts, and shopping malls; but we cannot recreate wilderness and other natural areas. ■

Congressman Anthony C. Beilenson represents the Twenty-third District of California, which includes western Los Angeles County. He has proposed legislation that would preserve the Santa Monica Mountains and the Channel Islands from destructive forces.